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THE LIVING WORD, HEBREWS 4:12.

By THOMAS F. DAY,
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The "Word of God" in its profoundest sense is he who is called the Logos by preëminence. The whole doctrine of divine revelation rests ultimately upon two great truths. First, God in his essential being is One "whom no man hath seen nor can see," yet, One who desires to draw near to men in loving fellowship; but such a drawing near is forbidden by the infinitude of his being and the limitations of humanity. Second, the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, makes such fellowship possible. He interprets the unseen God to finite and perishing men. This theanthropic person, moving in the sphere of revelation, is the first of the prophets, and the source of all prophetic authority. In all theophanies his person is the central and essential fact. He is Yahweh of the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ of the New.

From this point of view the characteristic feature of divine revelation is the theophany. Apart from the Logos a theophany is impossible, and without a theophany there could be no revelation. Through him every communication from God is mediated.

Generally, therefore, in Scripture the Word of God signifies something which the Logos directly communicates to men. Attention is here confined to the biblical revelation. Whether the communication was by dream or vision, or by internal spiritual impression, or by external manifestation, it was called the Word of God. They who received it said, "Surely God is in this place." The earliest believers had only this to bind them to the unseen. By this they received their effectual calling; by this their faith was quickened and their hope sustained; by this God proved himself their personal friend and guide while they sojourned in the land of promise. Choosing the simplest means

of communication he varied the mode that none might become stereotyped. Thus he impressed himself indelibly upon their minds as the living God. The medium was transitory, but the revelation was permanent; the vision faded, but its eternal significance remained; the instrument of revelation sank out of sight before its glorious content. The outcome of all was that the men of the covenant drew near and ever nearer to Yahweh, the God of the covenant, whose self-revealing was their life and peace. This is indeed the end of all revelation, to bring men into fellowship with the fountain of life.

This intimate communion with the Living One gave to every spoken word a living potency; the message came straight from his presence, warm with the breath of his lips. It passed from the patriarchs to their children, receiving at intervals fresh accessions from the mouth of Yahweh. It was the main source of public instruction; it formed the staple of prophetic preaching. It is not improbable that there were inspired prophets who delivered the word of Yahweh to Israel and Judah whose very names, together with their proclamation, perished with their times. But a small part of the ancient oral teaching finds place in the Bible. Of the abundant ministrations of the Old Testament prophets only a splendid fragment remains. Similarly we know that what the New Testament omits of the words and deeds of Christ and his apostles, would fill many larger volumes than what it records. *Ex uno disce omnes.* No word of prophecy that bore the divine seal fell fruitless to the ground. The virtue of God's word depended not on pen of scribe. The oral message sped upon its errand, accomplishing that which he pleased, prospering in the thing whereto he sent it. The unwritten words of Jesus were as full of grace and truth as those which are recorded.

The Word of God has lost none of its vitality and invincible energy by passing into writing. The canonical Scriptures are God-breathed. In them it has pleased God to stereotype his revelation, yet so as not to interrupt the perennial flow of its vital current. Divine truth like molten gold ran into molds prepared for it. First the Hebrew tongue received it, then the Greek; the former, the intuitive language of childhood and nature; the lat-

ter, the reflective speech of manhood and supreme culture. From these it received its first linguistic flavor. These could not keep it, however, in their exclusive possession. "The Word of God is not bound." Its vitality keeps it ever in motion. Claiming every language of earth for its own, it uses each as a channel through which to pour its fertilizing streams.

The translations of the Bible exhibit marked characteristics of their own, for every new channel gives its specific color to the stream. The languages of mankind differ widely in respect to quality; some are vastly more sensitive than others to the finer phases of thought and feeling. Missionaries are sometimes compelled to invent terms for spiritual ideas. There are tribes in the South Sea Islands whose vocabularies originally had no word for God.

What shall we say then? Is the "Word of God" a misnomer when applied to the Scriptures translated into these scant vernaculars? We answer, No. Take the Bible in the most imperfect form in which it may be found; its vocabulary meager and halting; its freedom hampered; its moral beauty obscured and its power diminished; and we confidently affirm that even in such a form it is the power of God unto salvation. It is true that it does not rank with Luther's translation or that of the English revisers, but to all divine intents and purposes it is the Word of God for the tribe to whom Christian zeal has given it. By this we mean that the undying energy of truth is in it; it has power over human consciences; it gives the knowledge of sin, and proclaims the fullness of redeeming grace. It reveals the lineaments of the God-man, whose gracious call sounds divinely sweet in the rudest language spoken by man.

God's wisdom outruns us here; he pours his heavenly treasure into such vessels as the nations have at hand to receive it. Crude and incapacious as they are, they fulfill the purpose of his grace. As in the incarnation God came down to man's level in order to redeem him, so through these uncouth reproductions his word descends on the same merciful errand to the very lowest plane on which human intelligence moves.

In saying this we do not lose sight of the fact that the stand-

ard of revealed truth for all the world is found in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. By that standard all must be verified and tested. As the nations increase in intelligence, the various translations will be improved by being brought into more strict conformity with the original. But before the day of better versions comes, multitudes of souls will find God in Christ through the medium of these imperfect translations.

The cause of this perennial vigor is to be traced to the present activity of the Holy Spirit, whose work did not cease with the original promulgation of the divine word. He imparts to that word, spoken or written, his own boundless life. He breathes it daily as a fresh revelation to the souls of men. The Holy Spirit speaks to man as man. He is at home in every language. His illumination supplies the deficiencies of words. Mongrel dialects struggling to voice his truth become signs whereby he hails, convinces, and subdues the savage mind.

But the divine word becomes in the highest degree effective when it passes again out of its written form into that of articulate speech. We are in danger of not realizing the full import of the apostle's declaration that it is by "the foolishness of preaching" that the world is to be converted. What is preaching? It is not a mere repetition of the inspired word. It is something different from a homily based upon a text. Its distinctive mark is the unction of the Holy Ghost, whereby the truth of God and the personality of the preacher are fused into one; a regenerated man speaks forth the living word.

Apart from the necessity of interpretation, the truth of the Bible gets new charm and added power when uttered by the human voice. "Thoughts that breathe a divine life" spring from the lips in "words that burn" with heavenly fire. Thousands in Christian lands receive their first religious impressions through this instrumentality. Revivals everywhere attest its amazing power. Brainerd, preaching through an interpreter, who was himself at the time unconverted, wrought conviction in the hearts of hundreds of Indians. Missionary annals abound in similar examples. Popular usage calls the message from the

pulpit the word of God. This usage is plainly justified by the character and results of true preaching.

The Bible, although it contains the fundamental principles of divine truth, does not make specific application of these principles to all possible cases. Such application in its variety and wide extent is left to preaching. The pulpit, therefore, holds a unique place in the world by divine appointment ; its office is to make the living word contemporaneous with every age. Men will be set apart to the exercise of its high functions, in the future as in the past, by special anointing from above ; and it will remain for all time, until mankind is redeemed, a channel of converting grace.